

Concord-Alewife Planning Study

Meeting Notes: September 10, 2003 Committee Meeting

Committee Members Present: Doug Brugge, Peg Callahan, Pat Goddard, Hom Sack, Ann Tennis, Al Wilson, Joseph Barrell, Mitch Goldstein

City of Cambridge (Community Development Department, CDD): Stuart Dash, Iram Farooq, Susan Glazer, Taha Jennings, Catherine Preston, Jennifer Wright (Conservation Commission)

Planning Area Consultants: David Black, David Dixon, Ron Mallis, Christine Scott,

City of Cambridge (Department of Public Works, DPW): Catherine Woodbury, Owen O'Riordan, Rebecca Fuentes,

DPW Consultants: Robert France, Leonard Sekuler, Bill Pisano

Welcome & Introduction

The next committee meeting is scheduled for October 15th. The November 12th public meeting has been changed to a committee meeting. The next public meeting will be held in December. Handouts for this evening include an agenda, a copy of the presentation by Catherine Woodbury, a copy of the presentation by Leonard Sekuler, and a copy of the presentation by David Black.

Summary of Work

David Dixon noted that a broad approach to land use and public realm strategies for the area has been discussed. The goal of the plan is to create value for the area through an equitable zoning approach that transfers density based on the existing development potential of the area. The committee, in conjunction with the city and the consultants, has developed an urban design framework that includes a multi-use district with housing and research activities. New public streets and parks are included, and the retail component will include a walk-able community center. The plan will also incorporate flood control measures. Furthermore, zoning and implementation procedures will be a critical part of the plan.

Committee Discussion

What is the timeframe for the plan?

The plan has an outlook for approximately the next 20 years. The City recognizes that the plan should have an outlook that is long enough to incorporate 2 strong real estate development cycles.

What is the potential to locate a significant amount of affordable housing in this area, since the plan is going to rely on private investment?

The consultants responded by explaining that increasing the market value for the area actually works to support the creation of affordable housing. The City will also be active in this effort by creating incentives to encourage the use of resources created through development to support affordable housing.

Is a car link for the area the consensus of the group?

The committee, consultants, and City staff have not reached a consensus on the idea of a direct car link over the rail line between the Triangle and Quadrangle areas.

Traffic and safety concerns on Blanchard Road must be discussed.

Blanchard Road was identified as an area of concern in Committee discussions and the final plan will address Blanchard Road as positive change occurs in the study area.

Committee members requested meeting materials prior to the meeting for review.

A committee member reported that she did not receive notification of the meeting in advance and would like mail notification significantly in advance of meetings especially for those without access to email.

Stormwater Issues

Catherine Woodbury noted that it is important to incorporate stormwater management goals into the planning process including understanding the watershed as well as maintaining and improving infrastructure to reduce flooding and improve the water quality in the area. Catherine noted that the amount of pavement, the concentration and timing of flows increase flooding in the watershed.

The City of Cambridge currently uses a combined system to handle both sanitary sewage and stormwater. The system has managed relief points to prevent water from backing up in the system. When the system reaches capacity during some storms, these combined sewer overflows (CSO's) release untreated sewage and stormwater into the area waterways. The amount of sediment transported, pollutants from cars, and combined sewer overflows (CSO's) also reduce the quality of the water in the watershed.

The Department of Public Works provides maintenance for the drainage system, engages in education to encourage helpful public behavior, and sweeps the streets to prevent debris from entering the system. In addition, the DPW has developed a long-term CSO control plan including a proposed design for the Alewife Brook Reservation, and encourages the use of best management practices for new development. The Department of Public Works is also in the process of separating the sewer and stormwater drainage systems throughout the city.

Robert France presented examples of Low Impact Development practices (LID's) that are water handling landscape elements that hold water within the watershed to help control flooding and improve the quality of water flowing to natural waterways. The LID's shown include green roofs, linear green space associated with parking, rain gardens, permeable pavement, downspouts to gardens, pavement reduced driveways, sidewalk gardens, rock dissipators and treatment wetlands.

Leonard Sekuler reviewed the watershed model that has been developed for the area and encouraged the use of LID's to reduce flooding and improve water quality. The Little River Watershed currently has less than a 2-year storm capacity. On-site retention of water in the study area is needed for the 2-25 year storms. The model predicts flooding in certain spots in the study area during the 25-year storm. LID's are needed to reduce pollutants and hold water to prevent flooding.

Committee Discussion:

Is the build-up of heavy metals a concern?

LID's can incorporate phyto-remediation to capture heavy metals. A more significant pollutant is transported sediment and LID's would help prevent erosion that can result in sediment accumulation. It was also that maintenance of any LID system is critical.

How can road construction be coordinated with DPW work on Blanchard Road?

The manholes were replaced last year and notice to the community will continue for work in this area.

Preliminary Transportation Analysis

David Black presented a preliminary analysis of traffic volumes. He noted that the analysis deals with a 20-year timeframe. The traffic model generates specific rates based on trip generation, mode split, vehicle occupancy and the distribution of origins and destinations.

The presentation consisted of a comparison of two simple projections, existing pm peak period trips and pm peak period trips under existing zoning with full build-out. The projected trips under existing zoning with full build-out conditions show a slight decrease in the existing trips due to a change in mode share. Although mode share would change due to changes in commuting patterns (such as an increase in transit ridership) new trips generated by additional development would result in an overall increase in trips in the planning area under a existing zoning full-build conditions.

The roadway network affects the traffic generation, in addition to roadway volumes. Reduction of increases can be accomplished through strategic land use choice, restriction of parking supply and other initiatives.

Committee Discussion:

How will the regional traffic patterns work with the locally generated trips? How can the plan address the quality of traffic on Blanchard Road?

There is a regional network of roads, but the local traffic will be more significant and easier to address through the planning study. The specific concerns for Blanchard Road were acknowledged.

Generally, the committee noted that the environmental issues and the traffic issues were well addressed; however, individuals noted that the committee should continue to consider the time frame of the analyses and balancing local vs. regional concerns.

Public Comment:

It was noted that balancing traffic issues such as safety and handling traffic efficiently will continue to be important. There was a request that more pictures of traffic are integrated into the analysis to communicate the experiential quality of the numbers. It was also noted that the existing traffic generation should be considered by committee members rather than the projected traffic generation under full build-out conditions in order to ensure that traffic impacts are reduced. Someone pointed out that a regional solution is needed to decrease the overall traffic in the area. There was a request for the incorporation of flood-plain data in the stormwater discussion. Someone commented that the stormwater options shown in the presentation were very positive and the development of a public amenity for the area would be desirable. Traffic and flooding are real issues for the area and local and regional perspectives are needed. Another person pointed out that there are international examples that can inform work in the study area. Holland does lots of work with handling water to create usable land. The environmental emphasis was noted as a positive feature, but there was concern about the area north of the railroad tracks and the lack of discussion of the habitat potential of the area. It was noted that this area can be characterized as an "Urban Wild" and should be viewed as a fantastic area resource. Quality of life should also be used as a planning criterion.